Griffin 7,50 119281

"It's Down There
Someplace": Oil
Exploration in
Harney County

HOSE WHO settled and populated Oregon east of the Cascades probably endured more than their fair share of failures and frustrations. Maybe that should be expected, given the relative harshness of that country. But in the early twentieth century, when prime land for settlement elsewhere in the West was becoming scarce, vast open areas in eastern Oregon were looked upon more favorably as potential locations for towns and communities. Still, considerable enterprise was usually required to coax people and investment into these less-than-alluring areas. This gave rise to various schemes designed to convince potential settlers that the region was on the threshold of wholesale expansion and bountiful prosperity.

A mile north of Narrows, Oregon (where Harney and Malheur lakes come together), along the Double-O Ranch Road, lies the Wellington Townsite and the Hass-Griffin Addition, platted in 1912. My grandfather, Gerald Griffin, had hoped to build a Catholic church at Wellington, and he gave land for that purpose from his homestead holdings. Marcus Haines wrote to me of this hopeful period:

In 1913 a railroad line was surveyed through the Valley from Crane near Lawen, thence on to the north side of Mud and Harney lakes and on west past the Double-O Ranch. Wellington Howell was quite a promoter, and with the help of H. L. Hass, who had the store at The Narrows, and your grandfather Griffin, they laid out the townsite of Wellington.<sup>2</sup>

G. Wellington Howell was an oil-well promoter, and the success of his Wellington Townsite venture ultimately rested on his and others' belief in an imminent oil boom in the area. But oil turned out to be one of Harney

County's great "nonevents," along with irrigation, electrical power, rail-roads, and grazing.<sup>3</sup>

It must indeed have been tantalizing for Pacific Northwesterners to hear of a "black gummy substance" oozing from sand under Harney County's rimrock, or to light a stream of gas issuing from an artesian well on an ancient lake bed. Skeptical scientific reports seem to have impressed few, since promoters, investors, and drillers went right on promoting, investing, and drilling. Historian Peter K. Simpson might easily have been referring to oil-well promotion, instead of irrigation, when he wrote of "the Chamber-of-Commerce attitude typical of growing Western settlements, led by local newspapers, like those of Harney County."<sup>4</sup>

The first recorded "oil strike" in Harney County took place in early 1909. This well, drilled originally for water in 1908 on the L. M. Leek homestead, caused a flurry of excitement. The Burns *Times-Herald* of February 12, 1909, reported:

John Hodder and one of the Dawson boys were up from Sunset the first of this week and reported that Walter Hodder had struck a strong flow of gas at a depth of 360 feet while sinking a well for John Leek just this side of Malheur Lake. It seems Mr. Hodder and a man helping him were removing the drill rods when a sudden roaring sound was followed by a rush of water and gas that shot high above the surface. A second explosion was witnessed but later subsided. The rush [of] water was accompanied by a considerable amount of stones of various sizes together with sand and mud. . . . There is reason to believe that a strong flow of gas and oil underlies this section and no doubt this will cause some investigation.

A month later, on March 13, the *Times-Herald* quoted Addison Bennett, a San Francisco speculator-engineer who drifted in and out of the area with grandiose ideas on how to develop Harney County's resources: "As to the oil and gas proposition, that seems practically solved. At least they have struck gas in paying commercial quantities, and there is little doubt about striking oil." Earlier, in the *Times-Herald* of February 13, Bennett had suggested digging the Malheur Gap low enough to drain the Harney Lakes, thus making available the land underneath for more drilling. On April 24 the newspaper announced: "THE HARNEY VALLEY OIL & GAS CO. ORGANIZED. According to men who are experienced and who are capable of judging, we undoubtedly have one of the best gas wells on the Pacific slope." This newspaper coverage marked the beginning of a tireless, and reckless, promotional campaign on the part of Julian Byrd of the Harney County *News* and the Burns *Times-Herald*. While Byrd urged local owners to sell or lease sites to local developers and



This long-abandoned oil derrick, located a few miles west of Lawen, Harney County, was photographed in 1973 by Eugene E. Luckey. An adjacent greenhouse piped hot water to the shanty on the site. (Courtesy Eugene E. Luckey)

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investors before large oil companies invaded the field, he consistently ignored or misconstrued scientific evidence questioning the viability of oil and gas exploration in the area.

In 1911 the U.S. Geological Survey published Chester W. Washburn's "Gas Prospects in Harney Valley, Oregon." Washburn, who had visited the area in 1899, quoted information provided by his own investigations, data from previous surveys, as well as reports from the Harney Valley Oil and Gas Company and others. He mentioned the Leek water-drilling operation, which had struck gas at 357 feet in February 1909. The gas "hurled sand and salt water into the air to a height of 40 feet," Washburn wrote. By October the flow of gas continued, but at a greatly reduced pressure and volume, and "a very small quantity of oil" was observed. The pipe was only two inches in diameter, and the light hydraulic rig was too small to penetrate below the sand. Washburn noted that there were then eleven prospect wells being drilled on the north shore of Harney Lake, one every half mile, reaching depths of from 74 to 252 feet.

Washburn concluded that the region's geological strata are certainly of freshwater origin (and therefore not old enough to have produced petroleum), "although the oil prospectors of the locality believe without reason [emphasis added] that they are marine deposits." Later information further demonstrated the improbability that more than a small amount of shallow gas existed anywhere in the Harney Basin.

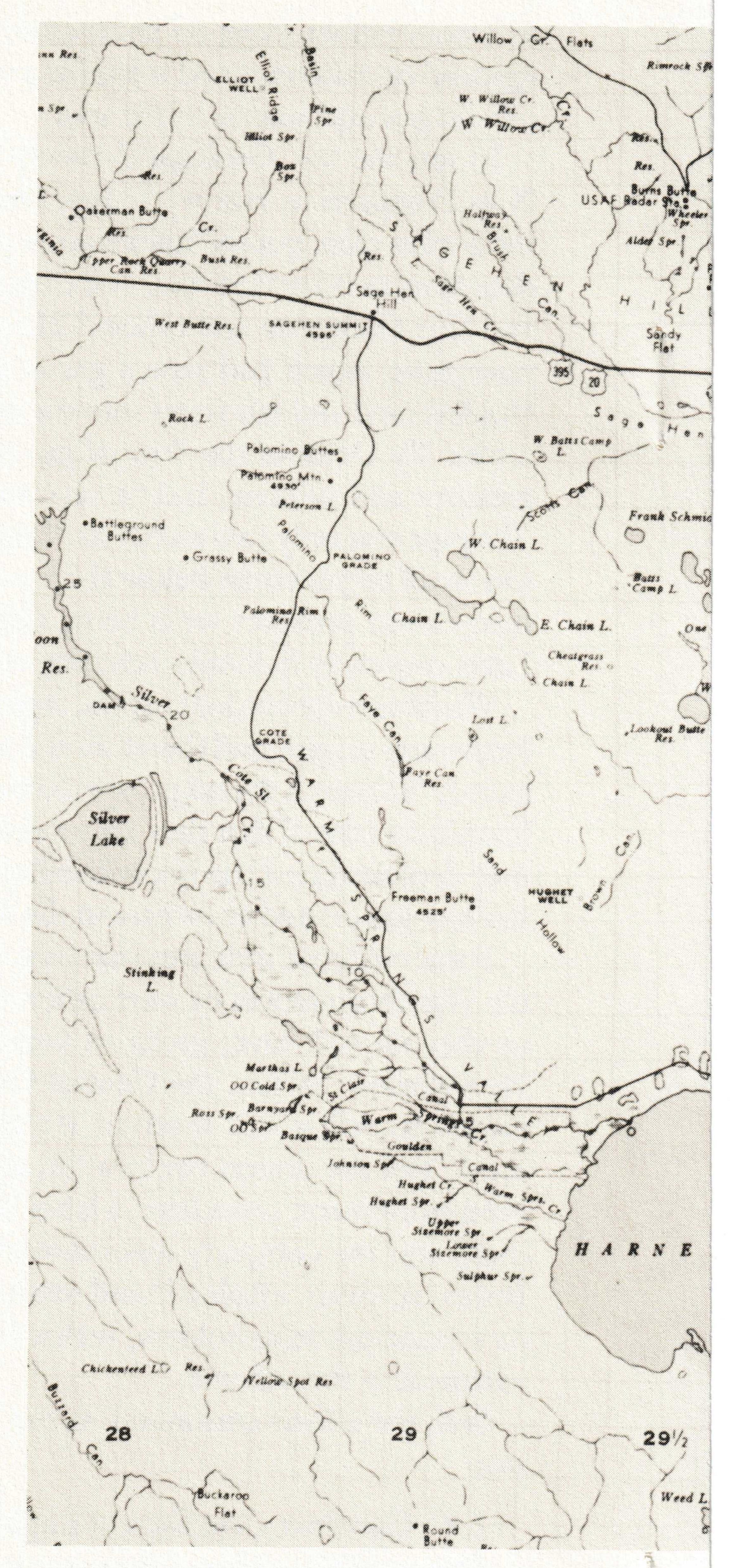
Some evidence indicates that later oil and gas explorers had either read the Washburn report or were otherwise exposed to its information. And so they should have, given its wealth of pertinent data and analysis.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, in 1912 the Central Oregon Oil and Gas Company proceeded to drill a well south of Wright's Point near Weaver Springs. At 4,000 feet the drillers broke a bit; by the time they recovered the damaged equipment, years later, a labor lien had been filed against the equipment and the company was ruined.<sup>8</sup> Thus, Charles Voegtly, a wealthy Burns hardware wholesale and retail merchant and one of the oil company's principal stockholders, realized nothing from his considerable investment in this scheme.

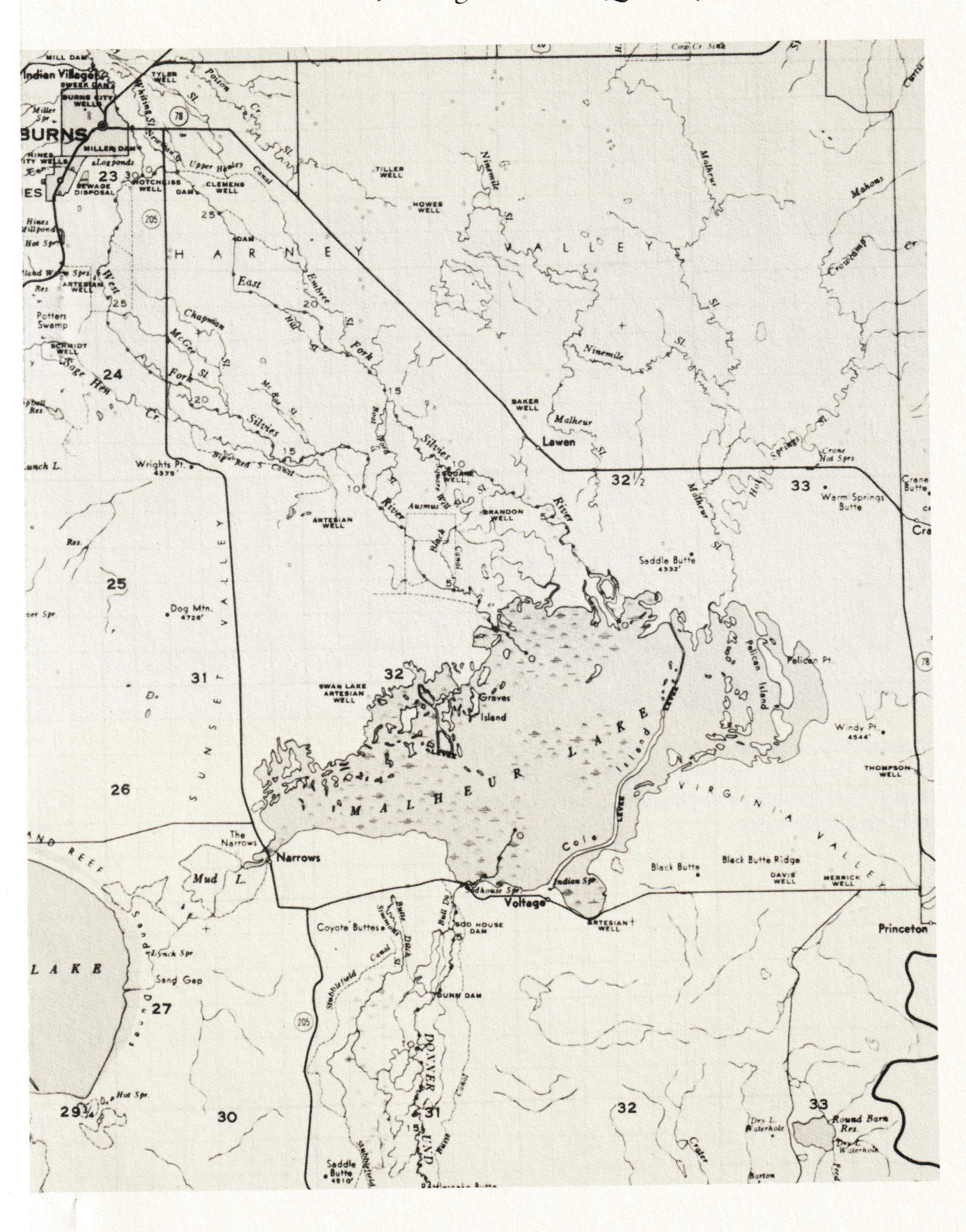
Still, the efforts continued, as the *Times-Herald* reported on April 19, 1913:

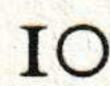
J. C. Gawthrop, Geological Engineer connected with the Central Oregon Oil and Gas Company, was here this week looking over the country again in the interests of his company. . . . "Why do we believe there is oil in Oregon?" Mr. Clark, an old time oil man of experience, seems to have confidence and he is backing his convictions with his money. "From my experience I fully believe there is oil in paying quantities in Central Oregon."

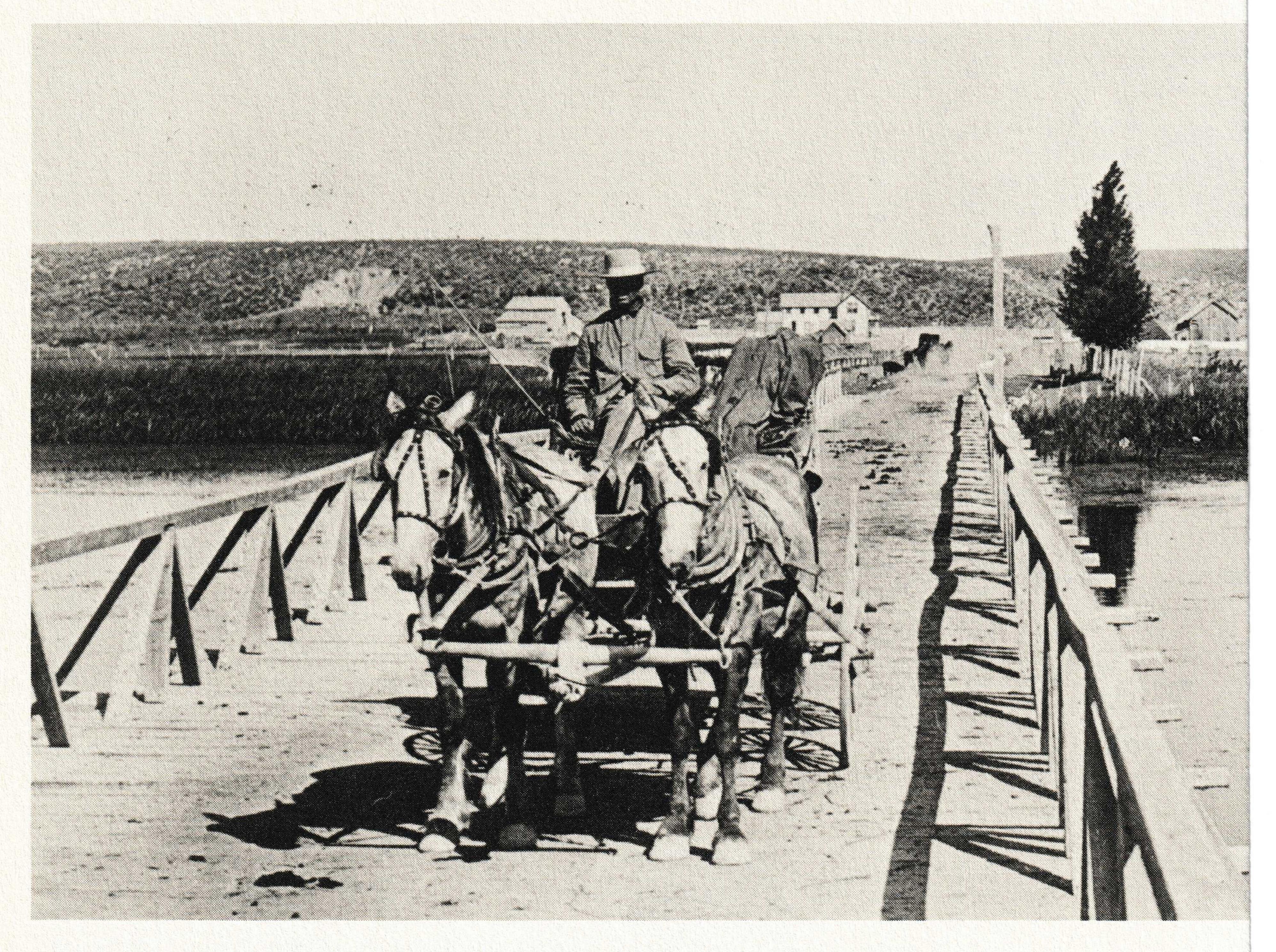
## 8 Oregon Historical Quarterly / SPRING 1992

This portion of Harney
County, bound approximately by Burns on the
north, Harney Lake on the
south, Malheur Lake on
the east, and Silver Lake
on the west, has encompassed virtually all of the
county's twentieth-century
oil drilling. (OHS neg.
OrHi 87538; from "Malheur Lake Drainage Basin," State Water Resources
Board, 1966)







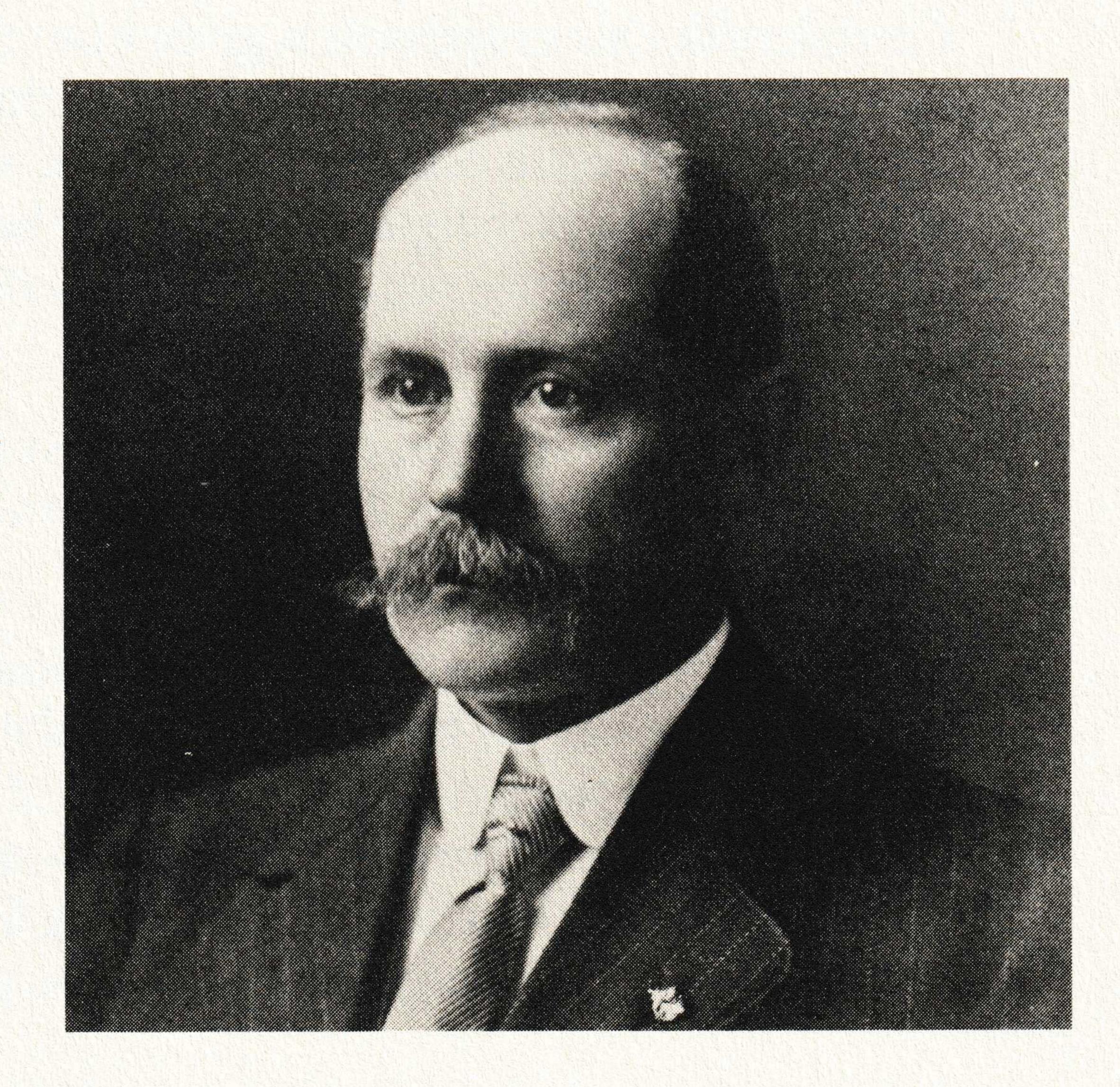


Horse-drawn cart crosses the wooden bridge at Narrows, Oregon. The photo, probably from the early 1920s, shows the town at its most prosperous and populous. (OHS neg. OrHi 84714)





Charles H. Voegtly, successful Burns hardware and farm-equipment entrepreneur of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. His speculation in Harney County oil exploration, though, came up empty. A descendant, Ray Voegtly, still lives in Burns. (oHs neg. OrHi 87484; from J. Gaston's Centennial History of Oregon)



Around the same time another oil well was drilled, under Dog Mountain in Sunset Valley. Ed Koeneman, who came to the region as a child in 1907 when his parents homesteaded, described the operation:

The oil well was started here in about 1913 or 1914, and they worked on and off. . . . Finally [they] gave up on it. It was a stock company. People around here was quite interested in it—to get down and see what was there. They went down 3,800 feet. That's where [Charley Backus and Arthur Hahn] finished up.9

In an article that appeared on January 9, 1915, in the *Times-Herald*, editor Byrd described an "oil well that has had such a hard struggle to get down to the present depth of 3,700 feet." The article quoted one of the well's "largest stockholders" but did not give the stockholder's or the company's name.

On August 19, 1918, the Burns paper reported on the "Howell well" (Dog Mountain) with this glowing headline: "MORE OIL IN HOWELL WELL." By the end of the short column, however, mixed results were indicated: "There seems to be no question of the presence of oil in this region but as to its quantity it is still speculative."

On August 14, 1920, another *Times-Herald* headline declared: "OIL WELL PROSPECTS STILL ENCOURAGING." The article read, in part:

The writer was one of a party to visit the Dog Mountain oil well last Monday. The workmen had shut down for the day before the party arrived but they were shown over the works by Mr. Arthur Hahn, one of the faithful men who has been at the well for several years.

Considerable encouragement is given from the fact that the gas escaping from the well is greater at this time than ever before. Each bucket [of water] that is brought up from the bottom of the well contains sufficient gas to light and burn. It is believed from this demonstration that they have not passed the flow they are seeking and indicates it is deeper. They are going after it.

In October 1920 Al Ottinger, described as a San Francisco millionaire capitalist, visited the well. The *Times-Herald* of October 23 quoted Ottinger as follows:

I'm tired of hearing so many excuses from those who have had this work in charge—not the boys who are actually doing the work, but those who are supposed to handle the financial end of it.

Charley Backus and [Arthur] Hahn have worked down there for the past five years without receiving anything in the way of wages; they are entitled to first consideration and I'm going to get some fellows when I get back to 'Frisco to put in with me and see this well to a finish.

The article then quotes W. G. [sic] Howell (who was not a geologist) in a long recital of the basics of the earth's geological periods as they apply to the Harney Valley, without, however, a word about oil. Editor Byrd concluded:

Harney County needs more men such as Ottinger to take an interest in its development. Men who do things are scarce. We have lots of fellows who make a big noise but they don't get anything done without persistence and energy. We confidently believe the Dog Mountain well will now come to a reality.

Ottinger and Byrd did not have to wait long to "see this well to a finish." When the Dog Mountain well reached 2,500 feet, an accident occurred. A newly hired "expert" dropped a long string of tools and cable down the hole, bringing work to a halt, and then promptly disappeared. It was rumored that the "expert" had been sent by major oil companies to sabotage the discovery of oil in Harney County. <sup>10</sup> When the well reached 3,807 feet, Charley Backus and Arthur Hahn sued for their wages. This incensed editor Byrd, who accused the formerly praiseworthy Backus and Hahn of sabotage and "economic vandalism":

It is a deplorable admission, the *News* must confess, that there are such short-sighted selfishness in the community that has plunged this laudable undertaking to reach oil into a blighting litigation, and, too, when so near the goal. . . . The "tie-up" and delay is little short of economical vandalism. <sup>11</sup>

## As Ed Koeneman explained:

[Backus and Hahn] did the last work on [the Dog Mountain well] and finished it up. There wasn't any money to pay them so they filed an attachment on the equipment and got a court order and sold it. A man came in here from Prineville and pulled all the casing out of [the well], and that was the end of that dream for Harney County.<sup>12</sup>

Still refusing to say die, however, the *News* had led its August 3, 1922, article (the one critical of Backus and Hahn) with this headline: "EASTERN GEOLOGIST SAYS OIL IS NEAR. Burns Well at a Depth of 3,805 feet. Believed about to Yield."

Koeneman has questioned whether "salting" might have been employed in trying to sustain enthusiasm for the undertaking:

Well, when they changed drillers there—I've seen this myself—they had oil. Indications came up in the baler, you know, and run down the creek there where they dumped the tailings. Whether it was actually coming out of the ground was never determined because no one run any tests on it to see if it was crude or manufactured oil put there to stimulate the interest.<sup>13</sup>

Whether "salting" or sabotage (or perhaps both) took place, the millionaire investors never came through, and the Dog Mountain well never produced oil. The well was shut down, Ottinger was never heard from again, and presumably Backus and Hahn never received their years' worth of back wages.

Meanwhile, in July 1919 Yale University geologist and oil specialist J. P. Buwalda had arrived in Portland to confer with H. M. Parks, director of the Oregon Bureau of Mines and Geology, who was then preparing to survey the Harney Basin. This was good news to editor-promoter Julian Byrd, whose *Times-Herald* of July 12 announced Buwalda's plans:

A government geologist has been assigned this territory to make an investigation of the oil and gas fields. Dr. J. P. Buwalda, geologist of this survey, has arrived in Portland for a conference with Mr. H. M. Parks, Director of the Oregon Bureau, preparatory to starting the work next week. . . . In the course of his work, Doctor Buwalda will probably examine all reported indications of tests drilled in the region. . . . The essential results of these investigations will be promptly given to the State Bureau for publication.

Buwalda's "Report on Oil and Gas Possibilities in Eastern Oregon," published in July 1921, referred to the activities of the Central Oregon Oil and Gas Company, whose well at that time had reached a depth of 3,763 feet. "The well is said to have given a little gas and to have shown a trace of oil," Buwalda wrote. It had been drilled through solid lava for its entire depth, and between \$100,000 and \$150,000 had been spent on it. Another well was drilled in the area, twenty-four miles south of Burns, eight or nine miles from Narrows. The company, Fidelity Oil and Gas, was organized in 1918. The well had reached a depth of 1,200 feet by 1921, and was extended later to 1,400 feet. A hole drilled earlier some six feet from this well had failed when gravel was reached at 460 feet and then sifted up to within 200 feet of the rig. While drilling the second well, the first continued to emit a small amount of gas. Buwalda wrote:

The location of the well is on the flat on which the two lakes [Malheur and Harney] lie, several miles from the margin of the valley, and the strata into which the well is being drilled are probably but a

continuation downward of the silts and clays being deposited in the lake basin at the present time. If drilled sufficiently deep this well ought to strike the same strata into which the Central Oil and Gas Co. well penetrates 8 or 9 miles to the northwest.<sup>14</sup>

Buwalda provided no one with reason to hope for an oil bonanza in the Harney Basin. He, like geologist Chester Washburn, pointed out that the possibilities of finding oil anywhere over the entire length, breadth, and depth of the valley depression were not promising. The beds, after all, are freshwater strata—"largely unconsolidated as well as recent"—and beneath these lies a thick layer of lava. Buwalda warned: "Pains must be taken to ascertain, if possible, whether the marine strata are too far altered to offer hope for oil, even though gas may be present." This assessment was not published in the Burns newspapers.

As late as 1925 promoters were still aggressively advertising the sale of oil stock, hoping to continue drilling old wells, and to open new ones, along the shores of Malheur and Harney lakes. The directors of the Harney Basin Development Company, of Spokane, Washington, and Burns, Oregon, set the following ambitious goals for their corporation: to develop the natural resources of Harney and Malheur counties in mining, timber, sawmilling, irrigation, grain, flour milling, railroading, townships, and oil. Optimistic claims were made: "We aim to assist in transforming the 'desert' into 'Fields of Blooming Grain,' and the 'sage lands' into 'Gushers of Liquid Gold." This stock company was organized and incorporated in 1925 by my father, Edwin R. Griffin, who was president; by Joseph Pelikan, who was vice president; by Edwin Brockhausen, a wealthy silent partner from Spokane; and by L. V. Brown, who was secretary-treasurer.

The company's prospectus contained a "letter" from President Griffin to potential investors:

Narrows, Oregon. April 12, 1921. Gentlemen:

I spent practically all my life in the Harney Basin, close to the Narrows. My faith in oil is based on facts which I have seen. There are great quantities of black gummy substance which comes from around Rim Rock on the south side of Dog Mountains.

This well was dipped out and showed a very high grade of petroleum; also oil sand.

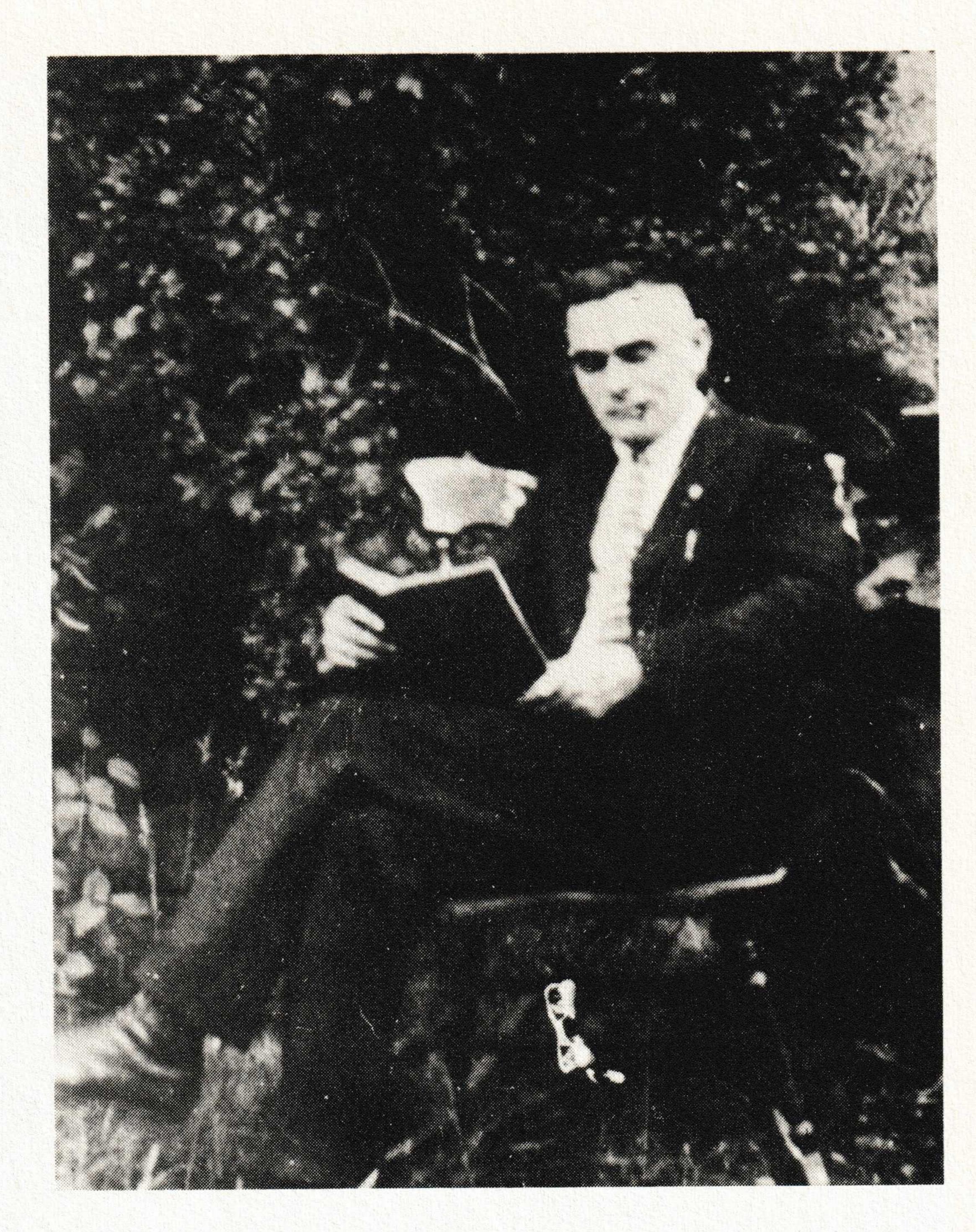
There was another well drilled by Archie McGowan about four miles northeast of Narrows. At a depth of 320 feet it gives a good sample of burning gas by lighting a match above the 2-inch hole.



Ed Koeneman (figure standing, right) identified this wooden derrick and accompanying outbuildings as a Harney County oil-drilling site. The building to the left of the stack was the boiler room, which supplied power to operate the drilling machinery. (OHS neg. CN 021226)

Edwin R. Griffin, in a rocking chair (right) at his home on Latawa Street, in Spokane, 1928. Author Dorsey Griffin recalls his father receiving stacks of oil-exploration news, and his father, in fact, labeled this photograph "Reading Oil News." (oHs neg. OrHi 87438; author's coll.)

This elaborate oil-stock certificate (below) was issued by the Florence Oil and Gas Company of Spokane, Washington. Author Griffin owns a "thick book" of these, a few, such as this one, signed by company officers. (OHS neg. OrHi 87487; author's coll.)







Field Examinations in Conjunction with Samuel Aughey, Ph. B., E. M., and H. E. Perlain, formerly with Standard Oil, Consulting Engineer and Geologist

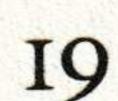
E. R. GRIFFIN Consulting Field Geologist

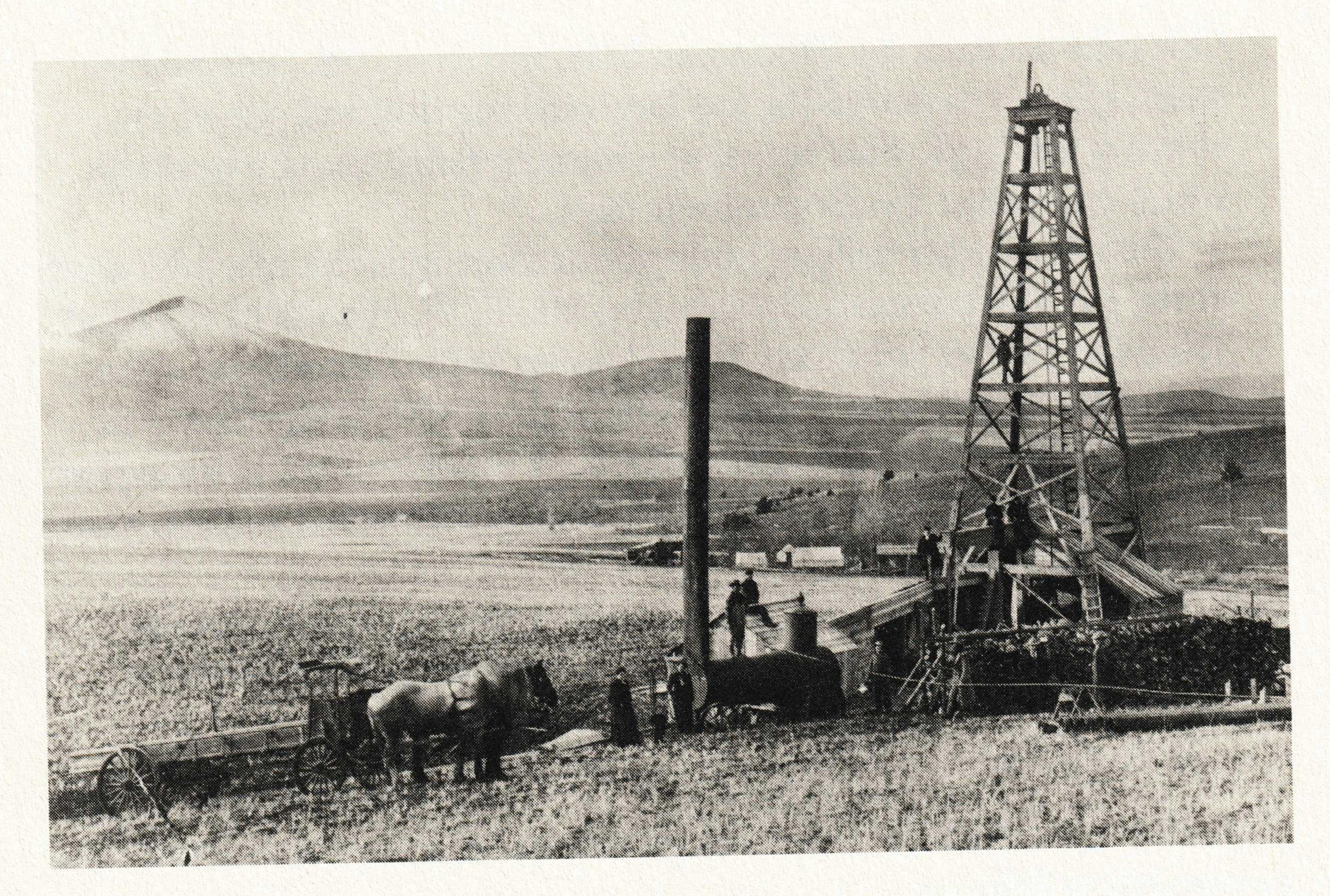
536 ROOKERY BLDG.

SPOKANE, WASH.

Edwin R. Griffin's business card, touting himself as "Consulting Field Geologist." Claiming only the qualification to show people around these "oil-rich" areas, he was careful not to imply either a formal education or a license in geology. (OHS neg. OrHi 87489; author's coll.)

Matilda Griffin (left) and Edwin R. Griffin (right), with Catharine Meyers and her three children, in front of a Harney County Land Development Corporation sign, in Sunset Valley, near Narrows, 1963. Edwin Griffin marveled at how people were taken in by this latter-day land swindle. (OHS neg. CN 020321)





This later Crook County oil derrick, built of steel, testifies to the ongoing interest in oil exploration in eastern
Oregon. This well belonged to the Madras Oil and Gas Company. (OHS neg. OrHi 28344)

One mile north of the McGowan hole, and the L. M. Leek homestead, gas was struct [sic] at 300 feet, blowing drill and gravel, etc., about 15 feet high. This hole sent a burning flame about 7 feet high which continued for about ninety days.

There is another drilling outfit about three-quarters of a mile south of the Leek Homestead, operated by Mr. G. W. Howell of Portland. This land adjoins your forty acres, known as the Florence oil claim. Before Mr. Smith's outfit pulled out of the Red-S field, which was drilled for the Miller & Lucks [sic] Co., it was examined by an expert who stated it would produce at that depth about seven barrels of oil every twenty-four hours.

We need a drilling outfit with a little capital to produce results, which without doubt lies under the Harney Basin. This land was classified by the u.s. Government as oil and gas land.

E. R. Griffin

Justice of the Peace A. F. B. George, of Lawen, was quoted in the same prospectus as follows:

The Rose Bros. have a prospect hole down 500 feet from which the gas burns bright and clear. . . . It is only a few feet from another well, also drilled for water, which when down 280 feet struck gas with such pressure that for a long time sand and rock were sent many feet into the air. When the torch was put to this stream of gas it ran up in a stream of flame. It lit up the country for a long distance until the pipe was plugged and capped. . . . The P.L.s. [Pacific Livestock Company] well, also drilled for water, is two miles north of the Rose well and at 800 feet it was found necessary to cap it because over six barrels of oil was taken from it a day. 16

Other parts of the Harney Valley Development Company promotional brochure were taken verbatim from Julian Byrd's promotional "news articles": "Mr. Howell thinks that the oil fields of Harney, Malheur, Lake, Klamath, Crook and Grant counties are Oregon's greatest asset and predicts that we are on the eve of their development."<sup>17</sup>

Earlier, in 1922, my father had incorporated the Florence Oil and Gas Company in Spokane, Washington. He had purchased the land—160 acres of desert northwest of Dog Mountain—in 1919, during the scramble to buy land in Harney County. No drilling ever took place at the site because the board's hired stock salesman absconded with the proceeds of his sales, and the directors quickly dissolved the corporation lest they become implicated in the crime.

Nothing ever seemed to dampen my father's spirit for mineral-wealth

adventuring, though. He was still interested in Harney County's oil potential as late as 1928. In 1933 he prospected for gold with a doodlebug in the American Mountains along Swauk Creek, above Liberty, Washington. In the later 1930s he poked up and down Jeff Davis Creek in Grant County with pick and pan and spoke wistfully of someday hunting for the legendary "Blue Bucket" mine. In 1956 he explored Steens Mountain with a Geiger counter.

It is doubtful that any large oil company ever tried to sabotage, or even paid much attention to, oil-and-gas-prospecting efforts in the Harney Valley. All the area's drilling was done by small local companies promoted and financed by otherwise successful business entrepreneurs. Washburn's and Buwalda's authoritative reports went unheeded. Long after these and other scientific studies had been made public, the Harney County oil entrepreneurs continued investing and drilling—men such as Archie McGowan, Charles Voegtly, G. W. Howell, E. R. Griffin, and Edwin Brockhausen. Skillful in acquiring substantial wealth in other fields, these men would not admit that the only evidence of oil in Harney County was the small amount of marsh gas that would sustain flame when a match was struck over holes drilled in the ground.

Oil exploration elsewhere in the state has also produced meager results. <sup>18</sup> Priscilla Knuth has written: "The *Bend Bulletin* of 5 May 1910 noted that the Madras Oil and Gas Co. was drilling for oil on the slope of Crook County's Grizzly Mountain. By May the well was 300 feet deep, expected to go to 3,000; it did not pan out." <sup>19</sup>

In 1914 geologists speculated that oil might lie under the Clarno Formation, in Wheeler County. In 1928 a depth of 800 feet was reached there; in 1929 water was struck at 1,500 feet, and a larger derrick was brought in at 2,000 feet. Promotion and investing were heavy as newspapers quoted "oil engineers" who declared the Clarno Basin to be one of the world's richest oil fields. And no oil had even been struck yet! By the time the drillers reached 4,800 feet in 1939, the investment capital was exhausted and the subscribers had nothing to show for it. <sup>20</sup> Jack Steiwer has written:

During the late 1920s, excitement came to Clarno in the form of oil explorations. One well was sunk by the Clarno Oil Company and many residents of the vicinity purchased stock at the rate of \$10 per share. On a Sunday afternoon, it was quite common to see visitors from all over the State sitting alongside the operations, waiting patiently for the black gold to come gushing from the earth. It never did.<sup>21</sup>

In 1928 the same "oil fever" that struck Clarno was caught by Fossil's citizens when the John Day Valley Coal and Oil Company sunk an exploratory well at the southeastern corner of the city limits. Dr. J. A. Reuter, of The Dalles, advanced approximately \$30,000. As with the Clarno development, local people put up the rest, and like Clarno, the John Day Valley undertaking was a complete disappointment.<sup>22</sup>

Despite new theories of oil formation and more effective recovery methods, no commercially productive oil wells exist in Oregon and none are likely to be found.<sup>23</sup> Ellen Morris Bishop, a consulting geologist who teaches at Central Oregon Community College, has written of the gloomy prospects of oil discovery in Oregon:

In Oregon, our sedimentary rocks . . . have the wrong kind of organic material to produce oil. We are a repository for the stuff of continents, woody and herbaceous, low in hydrogen, high in fiber, and 'humic' in nature and name. These low hydrogen organics, [with] sufficient time to decay, . . . will produce natural gas. But their compact structure does not allow them to develop into petroleum.<sup>24</sup>

John Eliot Allen, professor emeritus of geology at Portland State University, has written: "I suspect that oil will never be found around Burns, since Harney Lake and the Burns area are in two volcanic caldera, not a likely place for oil. Even southern Harney County has been mostly volcanic for millions of years." As for oil elsewhere in Oregon, Allen says, "My old professor, Warren De Pre Smith, told us in 1929 that he would drink all the oil ever found in Oregon."

Many wondrous mirages have been seen in Harney County's desert landscapes. A field of oil wells was one of them.

## NOTES

- 1. The quoted statement in the title is attributed to Dog Mountain oilwell driller Charley Backus. The full declaration is as follows: "It's down there someplace, and if we just go down we're gonna get 'er!" See Harney County Public Library, Harney County Oral History No. 13, Ed Koeneman interviewed by Marcus Haines (Spring 1973), 25.
- 2. Correspondence, Marcus Haines to Dorsey Griffin (Mar. 19, 1987). See also George Brimlow, *Harney County, Oregon, and Its Range Land* (Portland 1951), 255: "Hope for permanent service at the proposed Wellington townsite a mile north of The Narrows, in 1912, faded as no town arose in the degree expected in an oil-boom vision." In fact, no town arose in *any* degree at this townsite.
- 3. The county lost much of its best agricultural land first to "cattle kings"

- and then to the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge. Homesteading efforts eventually yielded to the region's killing winters, severe droughts, and jackrabbit plunder.
- 4. Peter K. Simpson, "A Social History of the Cattle Industry in Southeastern Oregon, 1869–1912" (Ph.D. diss., University of Oregon, 1973), 205.
- 5. Chester W. Washburn, "Gas Prospects in Harney Valley, Oregon," in Contributions to Economic Geology: Short Papers and Preliminary Reports (Washington, DC 1911), 57.
- 6. Ibid.
- 7. The Harney Basin Development Company (incorporated, 1925) prospectus includes select language that is strikingly similar to that used by Washburn in his report.
- 8. "From Out of the Past," Burns Times-Herald (Jan. 11, 1979).
- 9. Harney County Public Library, Oral History No. 14, Ed Koeneman interviewed by Pauline Braymen (May 9, 1973), 5. See also Oral History No. 13, where Koeneman says that the Dog Mountain oil well was managed by the Oregon Oil and Gas Company (p. 24); in Oral History No. 14 he says the Dog Mountain well belonged to the Eastern Oil and Gas Company (p. 5). Geologist John Buwalda (see note 14) reported that the well was owned by the Central Oregon Oil and Gas Company and was started "about 1912."
- 10. Oral History No. 14 (p. 6). Ed Koeneman often said—how seriously is not known—that the "accident" at the well was thought widely to have been caused by the "Texas expert": "Charley [Backus] always felt that [the Texan] was sent in by a big oil company to close the hole down" (Oral History No. 13, p. 26); and "later it was rumored that [the Texan] wasn't working for the Eastern Oregon Oil and Gas Company. That was just a minor check he got from them. His major check came from a major oil company who wasn't interested in having a well drilled here" (Oral History No. 14, p. 5).
- 11. Harney County News (Aug. 3, 1922).
- 12. Oral History No. 14 (p. 5).
- 13. Ibid., 6.
- John P. Buwalda, "Report on Oil and Gas Possibilities in Eastern Oregon," Mineral Resources of Oregon 3, 2 (July 1921), 29.
- 15. Ibid., 30.
- 16. The Rose referred to here was I. C. Rose, who represented "one of the best known oil and gas promoting companies on the Pacific coast."

While securing leases on land, he carried out "a thorough investigation of oil and gas prospects in the Harney Valley. He stated that his company will sink a well on the John Leek Ranch west of Lawen" (News, Mar. 11, 1920). The same issue of the News reported that the Pacific Livestock Company of Miller and Lux had no intention of drilling for oil. They wanted the Red-S Field only for raising fodder and watering their cattle.

- 17. See Times-Herald (Oct. 23, 1920).
- 18. Ray Treasher's Bibliography of Oregon Geological and Mineral Resources, with Digest and Index to July 1, 1936 (Salem, OR 1936) reported efforts to find oil in Malheur County near Vale, where wells were being drilled and more were being planned: "Some wells have brought in bubbles of gas and globules of oil. Mammoth Oil and Gas Co. well down 900 feet. Oil & Gas Company, down 1,700 feet, no oil. Columbia Oil & Gas, down 830 feet. E. Oreg. Co. has contracted to sink 3,000 feet, equipment on ground." For a record of additional oil wells drilled in Oregon, see Miscellaneous Paper 8: Available Well Records of Oil and Gas Exploration in Oregon, compiled by W. L. King, D. L. Olmstead, and V. C. Newton, Jr., rev. April 1982.
- 19. Thomas Vaughan, ed., High and Mighty: Select Sketches about the Deschutes Country (Portland 1981), 208.
- 20. Arthur H. Campbell, Antelope: The Saga of a Western Town (Bend, OR 1990), 263.
- F. Smith Fussner, Glimpses of Wheeler County's Past: Early History of North Central Oregon (Portland 1975), 29.
- 22. Ibid., 36. Many "prospect holes" and "wildcats" were drilled, in Harney and other Oregon counties, of which there is no lasting record at all. Laws regulating oil and gas licensing, exploration, drilling, and well abandonment in Oregon were not passed until 1923, and the state provided no funds for inspection, enforcement, and bonding until 1953 and 1961. See *Miscellaneous Paper 8*.
- 23. See *Oregonian* (July 10, 1988); correspondence, Dan E. Wermiel (petroleum geologist) to Dorsey Griffin (July 18, 1988); and Buwalda, "Report on Oil and Gas Possibilities," 47.
- 24. Ellen Morris Bishop, "Is There Any Oil or Gas in Them Thar Hills?" Oregonian (Oct. 20, 1988).
- Correspondence, John Eliot Allen to Dorsey Griffin (Feb. 24, 1989). Allen, however, does not rule out the *possibility* of finding oil in Oregon.